

OCTOBER 23, 1980

Drouth tension has subsided in the Shortgrass Country. Hombres that have had rain have calmed down; hombres in the dry areas are so whipped that their nerves have settled to their boot soles.

One of the hands at the ranch claims the secret to relaxing is simple. The way he overcomes his troubles is by taking a perfectly timed nap. He claims that if you'll drape your arm off the bed with a dinner fork in your hand held over a plate, when your grip relaxes enough to drop the fork, you'll wake up from the sound, refreshed and ready to go to work.

Being a great supporter of naps, I've been studying his method. Long afternoon siestas ruin my domino game. Too much time on my exercise mat (that's the living room couch) makes my mind so groggy that the spots on a double six look like a deuce or a trey.

The first afternoon I tried his plan, I overslept an hour and missed getting a seat for a game. Every time I'd drop the fork, I must have caught it before it hit the plate. I think the reason that my reflexes were working in spite of the deep slumber was from taking so many naps out in the pasture under mesquite trees without any fly protection.

I know that old cows that come out of the cow that come out of the cow jungle in South Texas never stop fighting flies even after they are shipped to high altitudes. Those old sisters' tail muscles grow so strong that canned soup companies won't dare use them for anything except specially fortified broth.

I've often wanted to see a draft of bob tailed Texas cattle weighed. I'd bet that they wouldn't weigh within 30 pounds of their pasture mates. Summer calves down there show yearling tails at three months of age. It isn't anything for a man's beard to be shaped like a cow's switch.

After that first trail failed, I changed to a plastic fork that the deer hunters had left at the bunkhouse. As long as the up-draft from my snoring didn't interrupt the fork's fall pattern, darned if I didn't catch it three out of four falls. On the few occasions when the fork did hit the plate, the sound wasn't loud enough to wake me up.

Actually, I didn't expect the experiment to work. Herders just don't make good guinea pigs. Back when acupuncture was so popular, nobody that I know of in the cow business ever got any relief from that ancient oriental craft.

Although the practice had worked on plenty of unbroke coolies from the wildest parts of China, they never could get a needle set in the herder's temple that he wouldn't buck out from under. About the time the doctors thought they had them stuck deep enough, every last one of the whole lot.

The same was true of the beads that hocus pocus doctors got to sewing in folks' ear lobes. No matter how deep a bead was buried under the hide, if the patient was a hollow horn operator there'd be so much head slinging and wild kicking that the bead would either end up in the wrong spot or get thrown out on the floor.

I'm going to give that fork idea a fair test. Discount houses in San Angelo sell an imitation bone handled fork that ought to fall too fast to be caught in midair. As hard as this old world is today, a man sure needs to be awake. I wish I'd got to be awake. I wish

I'd got to see a bog bead sewed into a steer man's ear before that business ended. It'd be quite a sight after a bad shipping day.